



Looking Back on an Office Move. What Were the Challenges and Successes?

In December of last year, Billi undertook one of the biggest challenges yet in the workplace. Moving office. The job was undertaken by staff members alongside their day to day roles, which proved challenging. However, now we are settled into the new space, all of those challenges were worth it.

The process of moving office took around 6 months, as we outlined in our previous post about the move. You can read more about that [here](#). Last time we spoke about the move, we still had three weeks to go until the move itself, and were in the final stages of the process. Now though, with everything finally moved in, we can tell you about the challenges we faced, any the successes we saw at the end. Hopefully, this content will prove helpful for any office managers, or facilities managers who are also tasked with organising and planning an office move.





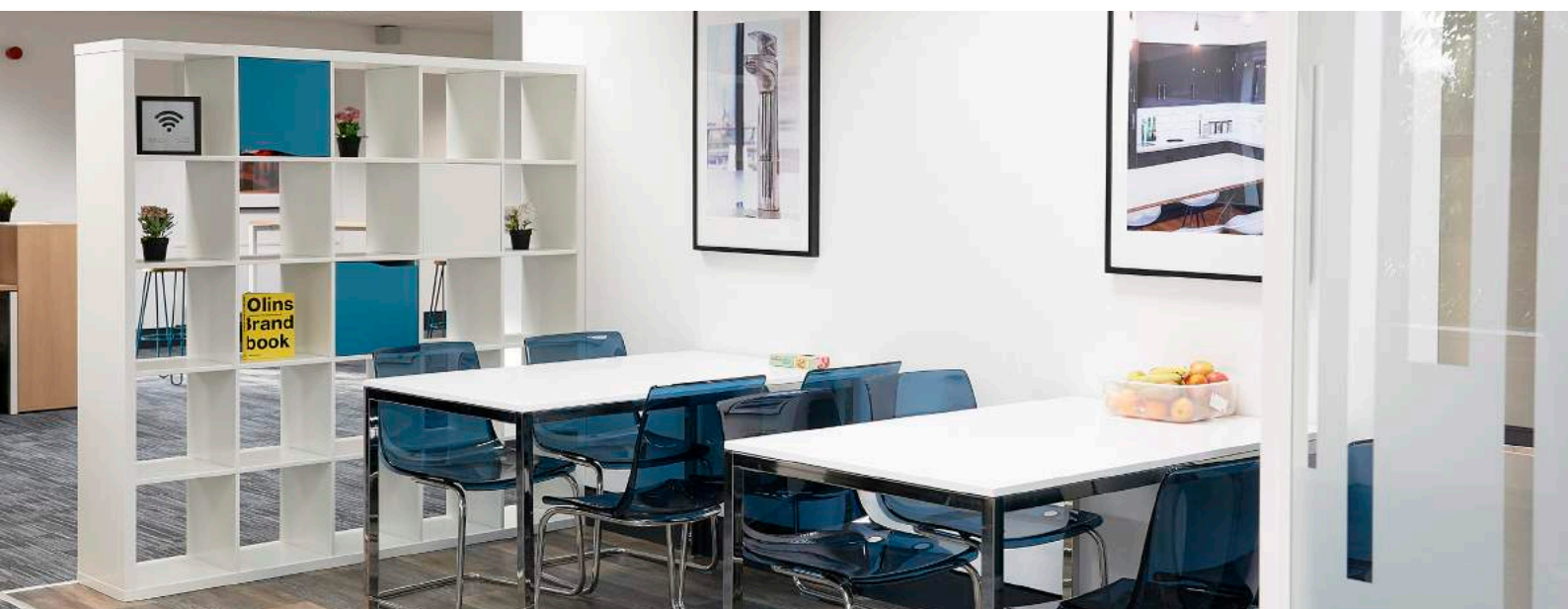
Timescale

When it comes to moving office, having a proposed timescale is essential. It is helpful for both those planning the move, contractors and also employees. Having a guideline of when to expect things means everybody is working to the same schedule.

Undoubtedly, there will be some set backs, but it's important to adjust the timescale plan accordingly. For us, the biggest challenge we faced that affected our proposed timescale for the move was the lease on the building. Negotiating for the lease started in April, and the move happened in December, so you can understand how long that can take to finalise.

If you do face setbacks, understand how they may impact other areas of the move. For example, with us, not having the lease finalised meant we were unsure of lead times for contractor and furniture suppliers as we were not sure when we would finally be in the office space.

As well as timescales for contractors and people responsible for fit out, on a much lower level, think about the time it will take employees to pack up their belongings. In our situation, each employee was given a crate to fill with their belongings for the move. It was their responsibility to pack their items, and their responsibility to move it to the new office, and unpack the other end. Overall, the disruption caused to work in order to pack and unpack was only half a day. Everybody moved quickly and efficiently on the task in hand.





Contractors

One choice you'll be faced with if you're planning an office move is considering which contractors to choose. Will you choose a local or national contractor?

For us, the decision was to go local. After weighing up the pros and cons, choosing a local contractor was more cost effective. Also consider that local teams may know other people on the same business park and so on, so will come with recommendations. The team will be local and they will like working locally to their home. It also means you will not have to budget for overnight hotel stays and the project will stay within their normal workflow. For a very large project, you may have to consider a larger, nationwide business. However, we chose a small, regional contractor who took on work within a 50-100 mile radius.

Good/Bad Things About Contractors?

For any project, taking on contractors you have not worked or had experience with before is a risk. Make sure to read reviews and testimonials from previous clients, and see if the projects they've worked on previously have been a similar size to yours. Fortunately for us, our contractors turned out to be good, and attention to detail was also very good. They guided us through the project well, and this meant we were happy with our selection of contractors.

When considering contractors, especially if you have never organised an office move before, pay close attention to competitive pricing, and lead times. If you get quotes from a few different companies, then you can compare pricing, and see who stands out. Remember, cheap is not always the best, as it means the work could be of a lower quality. Cheaper contractors could also mean longer wait times, which has a knock on effect on other parts of the move.

Luckily for us, all of our expectations and instructions were met by our contractors. Everything lived up to expectations. Just prior to move in, we went around the premises and created a snagging list when the project was near completion, however, the only issues were very minor final touches to decoration. Apart from that, it was very good quality work.

Challenges

Now we are settled, it is easier to see where we perhaps 'dropped the ball' concerning the move and the fit out. For us, it was not considering powerpoint wall screens, or TV screens on the wall for dashboards. This was something that was overlooked, and meant that showing presentations or screens was not as easy as it needed to be. Other challenges we faced were that we had to get variations of power sockets, and in the test lab we didn't instruct our contractors to install a water heater. These were the challenges that perhaps were the toughest to fix, and the most important to solve.

In terms of challenges that cropped up that were slightly less important, we had underestimated the task of getting the photocopier company to relocate the photocopier to the new premises. Overall though, our experience of the office move has been smooth from the start.



Budget

When planning an office move, you need to have a budget. That budget needs to be stuck to as best possible, and one of the best ways to keep track of spending is through a spreadsheet.

We recommend keeping track and keeping a record of ALL spending using spreadsheets. State your original budget, and outline it against actual spending. This way it's easy to see what the actual spending has been, and whether you're on or off target for budget. A good way for everybody to be on the same page for budgeting is to ensure the contractor is also keeping a budget and puts on the additional spending that may appear along the way too. Consider that there will always be one or two extras cropping up during the duration of the project.

Were There Discrepancies in Budget?

We kept pretty tightly to our pre-planned budget, specifically with contractors. Our contractors also kept a rolling schedule that outlined any extra work that had been done. Everybody's time sheets matched up upon completion of the project, so there were no unexpected or surprise costs at the end.

Planning and Expectations

You might be thinking, what's the first thing you should consider when thinking about an office move. In terms of the project, first, it's helpful to identify space and determine how it will be used/divided up. To do this, try and decide on a preliminary layout. Bear in mind that kitchen placement and infrastructure is dictated by drainage and water points. For this reason, you need to know what infrastructure is already in place.

At the new Billi offices, internet connection was a challenge we faced. The new space had internet, but we needed to ensure it was very fast internet so that we could run the office and continue providing excellent customer service without any disruption. For this reason we needed very fast internet that wouldn't hinder our employees work.

Furniture, is another thing that has be considered with any office move. Presumably, with moving office, you will want to redecorate, or at least spruce up the new space. We decided to do some research on the kind of furniture we wanted, but we actually ended up using a company we had dealt with previously. This company provided the furniture in the London office too, so we knew they were a good supplier to deal with. The furniture was cost-effective on desking, screens and storage. We would have struggled to find anything else of such good quality for the price point we secured our items at.

Seating however, was slightly harder. For us, it was important to get staff feedback on the ergonomics of the chairs. Particularly because one of the criticisms of our old offices was that the chairs were uncomfortable. In the end, we went for chairs that had been up-cycled. The chairs were extremely high quality, expensive, ergonomic office chairs, but they were second hand, and had been reupholstered. This meant we got a high quality product suited to our lower budget.





Requirements From Staff

It's tough to deliver a perfect office. Especially when everybody is taking on the challenge on top of their usual workload. Were there any first week challenges you're probably wondering? We've had a good reception from staff so far!

We did involve the staff so that they were happy with the outcome. However, we ultimately used our professional experience to make informed decisions. In terms of use of space, there have been no massive challenges. But, because it's been winter, the sunlight is currently quite low. We initially decided on no blinds, but now we are having to reconsider that as it is too bright and affecting the way people can view their monitors.

Top 4 Things to Think About

1. Have a definite plan for the business and strategy for the future. You need to consider what your business will be doing in the future, to ensure the layout of the office is right for growth of the company. For example, will people be hot-desking? Or, will they be working at fixed desks? The space needs to have the capacity for growth aspirations and work and change for what you need it to. There is no point moving into a space you will grow out of, or moving into one that is unable to suit your requirements in 3-5 years. Planning with 3-5 years in mind is good, as it often ties up with the lease times too.
2. Put contractors into a competitive scenario. This is a good cost saving tip for office managers. Save money by letting contractors know they are up against other contractors so that they provide the best price. This should mean you'll have contractors delivering high quality work on a lower budget.
3. Ensure you have good infrastructure. Pay attention to IT connection, and internet connection. Also consider, are there parking and public transport links? This is important if you want to hire or attract new staff. Often people are attracted to a work place that is easily accessible from the closest city.
4. Select a good contractor and furniture supplier. You need to have a good commercial relationship with guidance. This helps create a good plan and programme for when relocation will take place.



How Important is an Office Manager?

We didn't have an office manager as such, as this project was all run by the people involved above their day job. After this project, we are planning to employ one though. Particularly, because some of the jobs that arise within the workplace do not fit under anybody in particular's job role.

Ultimately, we believe you need somebody responsible for putting systems in place, looking after the air conditioning system, somebody that is responsible for postage and mail, lunch and snacks, cleaning companies and rotas, and sanitary supplies etc. These are often things you take for granted, but that's why you need somebody in particular to look after them.

We asked our project manager "What did you enjoy most?" about the office move project. He said that "Getting involved in some of the design", was his favourite part of the process. "Picking colours, seeing it come to fruition and seeing the end result." As a result of lots of hard work from the team, we have ended up with a very nice office space. The look and feel is of far higher quality than what they actually spent.

We'd like to thank all the contractors, suppliers and staff who made the move possible. With special thanks to our contractors, Acorn.

